



1108 City Park Avenue, Suite 200
Columbus, OH 43206
614.827.0549
www.ohiopovertylawcenter.org

**Ohio Poverty Law Center
Graham Bowman, Staff Attorney
House Bill 166
Finance Subcommittee on Health and Human Services
April 10, 2019**

Chair Romanchuk, Ranking Member West, and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify as an interested party on several issues in HB166. My name is Graham Bowman and I am a staff attorney with the Ohio Poverty Law Center.

The Ohio Poverty Law Center's mission is to reduce poverty and increase justice by protecting and expanding the legal rights of Ohioans living, working, and raising their families in poverty.

Drawing on the day-to-day experiences of the legal aid attorneys who provide civil legal services to low-income Ohioans in every county, we are supporting and requesting investments and policy changes that will improve the lives of low-income Ohioans.

We support many aspects of the Governor's proposed health and human services budget and will highlight how various investments work together for the benefit of Ohio's communities. We are a member of Advocates for Ohio's Future and support the issues that they testified to at yesterday's hearing. Today, I will focus on three issues: Lead poisoning, SNAP Employment and Training opportunities, and TANF.

Investments in Preventing Lead Poisoning

Ohio's rate of young children with elevated blood lead levels is higher than the national average. In some areas of the state our lead poisoning rates of children rival that of Flint, Michigan's. Cleveland's rate is 14.7% of children tested compared to 7% in Flint. Statewide 7.3% of children have elevated blood-lead levels. The rate nationally is 4.2%. The problem is likely worse than our official data suggest because our Medicaid program is woefully behind on its legal requirement to test all children for lead poisoning. Only 42% of one and two-year-olds enrolled in Medicaid were screen for lead poisoning in 2017.

When properties are found to be contaminated local governments and property owners lack the resources to clean up the hazard.

We know lead poisoning is hazardous, but the *way* in which it is hazardous is sometimes glossed over.

Lead primarily causes lifelong developmental and behavioral issues, not physical ones. This committee should keep this in mind when considering Governor DeWine's investment in combatting the lead poisoning crisis. Today's lead poisoned toddlers could be tomorrow's multi-system youth who may struggle the rest of their lives. Their developmental and behavioral challenges will financially burden our

schools, child welfare agencies, Medicaid program, and criminal justice programs. We urge this committee to maintain the Governor's proposed investments in preventing and combating lead poisoning. The long-term benefits vastly outweigh the costs.

Specifically, we support:

- Preserving the CHIP Lead Abatement program match in the Department of Medicaid's budget.
- \$450,000 over the biennium for licensing lead abatement workers and contractors.
- \$800,000 to help qualifying property owners with lead abatement and for demolition of lead-blighted properties.
- \$46.5 million over the biennium in new funding to expand access to developmental and behavioral supports for young children with lead poisoning through Early Intervention at the Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities. This funding, while not solely for lead exposure, will allow early intervention services to be available to all children with elevated blood lead levels without having to demonstrate a developmental delay.
- \$5 million in a nonrefundable personal income tax credit to reimburse for lead abatement work. The tax credit is capped at \$10,000 per household with income eligibility limits.

SNAP Employment and Training Federal Match

Fixing the lead crisis requires more workers, which brings me to my next topic. Employment and Training through the SNAP program.

There are a wide range of in-demand jobs that would increase the earning potential of low-income Ohioans if they received the right training and supports including new lead abatement specialists.

Ohio's able-bodied adult Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program recipients are required to work or participate in a training program. Ohio has an opportunity to dramatically improve the quality of the SNAP Employment and Training (E&T) program in Ohio and draw down a federal dollars to match a community's investment.

We know that high quality education and training can lead to meaningful employment opportunities. Without planning and investment, too often SNAP recipients are only able to fulfil the requirements by mowing grass at their JFS office or other activities that do not teach new skills.

Federal dollars are available to reimburse state, local, and private investments in SNAP E&T programs at a rate of \$1 for every \$2 spent. These are called SNAP 50/50 funds. However, Ohio draws down very few of these dollars because neither the state nor county JFS agencies have the administrative capacity to enter into contracts with quality workforce development providers on a large scale.

We ask that this committee fully support the Department of Job and Family Services budget requests regarding workforce development, which will support a new initiative to draw down 50/50 funds for partnerships with community colleges. In addition, we ask that an additional \$4 million in each fiscal year be added to the ODJFS budget to develop the administrative capacity to draw down additional 50/50 funds throughout the state, to support a much wider range of potential SNAP Employment and Training providers, and to create new programs in underserved areas.

This investment will create capacity throughout the state for community-based non-profits, community colleges, workforce development agencies, and employment-related support service providers to draw down an uncapped amount of federal reimbursements for investments they are already making using existing state, local, and private dollars. Over time the amount of uncapped federal reimbursement drawn down to local communities will vastly outweigh the initial capacity-building investment we are asking for today.

TANF's OWF Monthly Benefit

Lastly, I would like to discuss TANF. Advocates for Ohio's Future provided testimony regarding the TANF program yesterday and we will not repeat their facts and figures today. Instead I would like to discuss our over-arching concern with the TANF program, which is that its core programming: (1) cash assistance to needy families, known as Ohio Works First (OWF) benefits, and (2) non-recurrent emergency benefits, known as the Prevention Retention and Contingency Program (PRC), have withered over time.

Enrollment in OWF has decreased and PRC benefits have become increasingly difficult for enrollees to access over the past twenty years. At the same time, the state has chronically under spent its federal TANF grant block grant during that same time period.

This annual underspending is why there exists such a large TANF reserve. While we support the proposed investment of these dollars in child care, it is important to point out that the reserves exist because the money was not being spent on benefits for needy families in sufficient amounts in the past.

While the reserves built up in the past are being allocated, there is nothing in the TANF spending plan that will alleviate future underspending in the next two fiscal years.

In this context, we ask for your support for an increase the Ohio Works First benefit by \$100 per month for all family sizes who receive cash assistance that is intended to help very poor families

Raising the monthly benefit amount by \$100 will help the poorest Ohio families and will ensure that TANF dollars are being used to support the core tenants of the program.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify and I am available to answer any questions members of the committee may have.